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Hints On Organ Accompaniment

BY
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PREFACE.

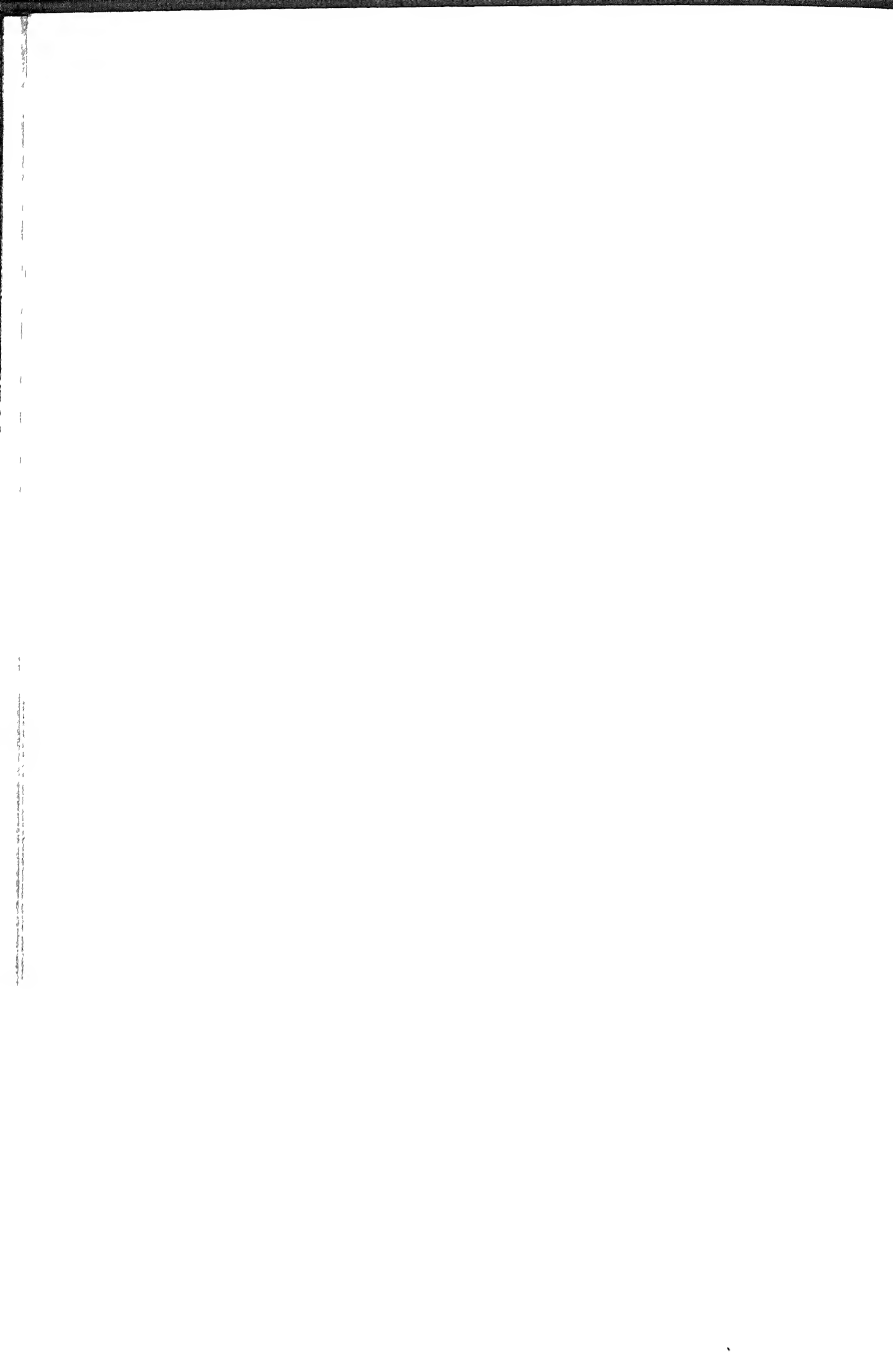
In view of the fact that an organist is frequently required to play various piano accompaniments on his instrument, and that many cannot adapt them effectively, it would seem that some ideas on this important subject might be of value to many organists.

In the following pages the aim is to help with suggestions rather than by giving definite rules, which must often be disregarded for specific reasons.

It is hoped that the suggestions given will prove of benefit to many who are striving to perfect themselves in a branch of playing too often neglected.

C. D.

NEW YORK, 1910.



Hints on Organ Accompaniment

CHAPTER I.

ADAPTING PIANO MUSIC TO THE ORGAN.



It may be stated at the outset that the majority of accompaniments of sacred songs, and some anthems, are written for the piano.

If they are played on the organ exactly as written they will often sound thin and ineffective. One reason for this is quite apparent when we consider a passage like Fig. 1. When played upon the piano, it would



FIGURE I.

naturally require the use of the damper pedal to give a sustaining effect. If played upon the organ in the same manner it immediately loses this effect, because each note of the arpeggio ceases to sound as soon as it is released, and only a succession of notes is heard, with

nothing sustained. To make it sustaining it would have to be played as shown in Fig. 2.



FIGURE II.

In view of the above, it will be noticed that holding notes on the organ approximates the effect produced by a use of the damper pedal on the piano.

The idea in adapting piano music to the organ is to preserve the character of the music and at the same time to make it sound effective. This might be partly illustrated by the following example of piano music, Fig. 3.



FIGURE III.

Suppose we play it upon the organ as it appears in Fig. 4. The sustaining effect of the



FIGURE IV.

damper pedal is obtained, but the character is missing. Let us now play it as in Fig. 5. By



FIGURE V.

holding the highest and lowest notes we obtain a sustaining effect, while the character is preserved in the repeated chords.

This is an example to show what is meant by adapting piano music to the organ. We will now proceed to consider other examples of different sorts.

It has been noted that when a key is released on the organ it immediately ceases to sound. In consequence of this repeated chords in quick succession will generally sound choppy. To avoid this choppy effect it is often best to hold one note of the chord, preferably the upper one. As for instance, in a passage like Fig. 6. It would generally be



FIGURE VI.

played on the organ as follows: Fig. 7. Of



FIGURE VII.

course, there are many exceptions to this. Sometimes a staccato effect is desired; if this is the case, by all means play it so. As an example of detached chords played exactly as written, might be mentioned numerous places in the accompaniment to the tenor solo, "Comfort ye my people," from "The Messiah." Under the head of repeated chords should also be noticed a common form of accompaniment like the following, Fig. 8. If played like this



FIGURE VIII.

upon the organ the effect is positively absurd. To make such a passage effective it is necessary to add something to it, which is shown in Fig. 9. The sustained notes give a most de-



FIGURE IX.

lightful, supporting effect in contrast to the harp-like chords in the left hand.

The next example is one frequently met with and seldom adapted correctly. It is represented by Fig. 10. Here it is quite obvious



FIGURE X.

that some change must be made; it could be played as follows: Fig. 11. Sometimes a pas-



FIGURE XI.

sage of this character can be rendered effectively in another way. Take that at Fig. 12.



FIGURE XII.

This could be played like Fig. 13. Again we



FIGURE XIII.

might have one like Fig. 14, played as shown



FIGURE XIV.

in Fig. 15.



FIGURE XV.

We now come to some forms of piano music which, on account of a player having but two hands, must be written to accommodate this unfortunate circumstance. Here is a passage found in Mendelssohn's "St. Paul,"

Fig. 16. Of course, it sounds very well on



FIGURE XVI.

the piano, but to play it literally on the organ would be foolish, for the effect would be all top and bottom and nothing in the middle. On the organ, the feet are almost as good as another hand and here is a splendid opportunity to let them assist. By transferring the left-hand chords to a different position we get a much better effect in having the middle filled up. The passage would now appear as shown in Fig. 17. There are many similar





FIGURE XVII.

cases where the left-hand part contains chords in a low register; it is always best to either thin them out, or transfer them to a higher position. An example will be found in the middle section of the chorus, "O great is the depth" from "St. Paul."

In the matter of filling up, circumstances will have to determine what is best to do. In "Unfold ye portals," Gounod's "Redemption," measures three and four are as follows: Fig. 18. Here a doubling of the chord in the right



FIGURE XVIII.

hand will give a fullness and sonority which seems quite necessary. On the other hand, in the introduction to the "Hymn of the Apostles," from the same work, the accompaniment does not seem to require any addition.

For the next example, let us take the ending of the well-known solo, "A new Heaven and a new Earth" from Gaul's "Holy City." The piano arrangement is shown in Fig. 19.



FIGURE XIX.

Surely this would sound very thin on the organ; a little judicious filling in will improve it. Fig. 20 gives a suggestion as to what might



FIGURE XX.

be done. In the case of an accompaniment like Fig. 21, it is better to hold chords with



FIGURE XXI.

the left hand, while the right plays the triplets indicated. Fig. 22 illustrates this.



FIGURE XXII.

As further illustrations, let us now take some of the specimen piano accompaniments given in the Associateship Examination of the American Guild of Organists and adapt them along the lines suggested. The first example in each case is the specimen piano accompaniment, followed by a method of adapting it to the organ.

Piano accompaniment.





The same on the Organ.

Sw.

Ch.

Ped.



Piano accompaniment.

The same on the Organ.

Organ accompaniment notation for 'The same on the Organ.' The score is written for three staves: *Sw.* (Swell), *Ch.* (Chorus), and *Ped.* (Pedal). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The *Sw.* staff features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The *Ch.* staff provides harmonic support with sustained chords and some moving lines. The *Ped.* staff contains a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The notation is spread across two systems, each containing two measures.

Piano accompaniment.

Piano accompaniment notation for 'Piano accompaniment.' The score is written for two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The notation is spread across two systems, each containing two measures. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, often in a more active, rhythmic pattern.

The same on the Organ.



Piano accompaniment.



The same on the Organ.



Piano accompaniment.



The same on the Organ.



Piano accompaniment.



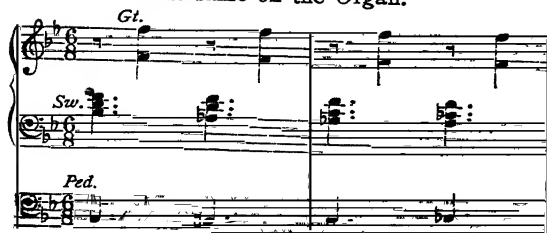
The same on the Organ.

The organ score is written for two systems. It includes three parts: *Sw.* (Swell), *Ch.* (Chorus), and *Ped.* (Pedal). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system consists of two measures. The *Sw.* part plays a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The *Ch.* part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The *Ped.* part plays a bass line. The second system also consists of two measures, continuing the melodic and harmonic development. The notation includes various musical symbols such as stems, beams, and accidentals.

Piano accompaniment.



The same on the Organ.



In adapting piano accompaniments to the organ there are other things to be considered

besides those already mentioned. Certain motives or melodies can often be brought out and emphasized with good effect. A melody, especially when forming a counter melody with the voice, should be brought out by means of a stronger tone on another manual. Take an example like Fig. 23. Here we have

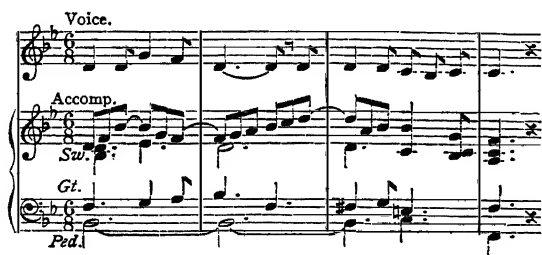


FIGURE XXIII.

a counter melody in the tenor part, which, by emphasizing, adds considerable interest to the accompaniment.

Again, in such an accompaniment as shown in Fig. 24, the soprano melody should be





FIGURE XXIV.

made a little prominent, for it imitates the voice and is almost equally important.

In Fig. 25 the intention is quite obvious:



FIGURE XXV.

the notes with their stems turned down should be played on a soft solo stop. Another example from "Eye hath not seen," Gaul's "Holy City," will show a beautiful solo effect. (Example, Fig. 26.) One more example from the



FIGURE XXVI.

same work in the solo, "My soul is athirst" (Fig. 27). Here the bass should be made



FIGURE XXVII.

prominent. Again toward the end there is a passage like Fig. 28. Play it as shown in Fig.



FIGURE XXVIII.

29. Scores of illustrations like these might be



FIGURE XXIX.

given. A good accompanist will be on the

lookout for them, to take advantage of the opportunity for little touches of solo effects.

In all accompaniment it is essential that sufficient support be given the singer, or singers. Suppose we had an accompaniment like Fig. 30. If an attempt to make it supporting



FIGURE XXX.

by playing it very loud were made, the arpeggios would surely be disagreeably prominent, and give no support. To remedy this and preserve the character of the music, it would be best to introduce chords for the left hand, while the pedal takes the bass. The chords would give the required support and could be played on a separate manual, while the arpeggios are played exactly as written. With this

alteration the passage would now appear as shown in Fig. 31.



FIGURE XXXI.

CHAPTER II.

ANTHEMS AND HYMNS.



WHAT applies to the accompaniment of a song will generally apply also to anthems. As a matter of fact, the accompaniments of anthems are nearly always written for the organ and can be played as written. However, in many cases slight changes are desirable, such as filling in to give greater support. A weak part, as the tenor sometimes is, can be assisted by making that part a little prominent on a separate manual. Frequent changes in registration are not desirable, except to produce variation of power; this is usually accomplished by the use of the swell pedal and a jump from one manual to another, upon which the stops can be arranged before beginning. Facility should be sought in the matter of playing with the feet and one hand while the other is used to beat time or signal directions to the choir.

An important part of the church organist's equipment is the ability to accompany hymns in a satisfactory manner. There are several ways in which hymn-tunes can be played. The most common and best way for general use is to play the tune as written, using the pedals

for the bass part. Another way is without the use of the pedals, playing the four parts on the manuals; this is often desirable when giving out a hymn before the congregation joins in. It is also effective in the middle of a long hymn to play one stanza without pedals. A third method is to play the soprano part on a solo stop, the left hand taking the tenor and alto on a separate manual, while the pedals play the bass. This method is sometimes very stimulating to a lazy choir or congregation. Another effective treatment is to have the choir sing a stanza, preferably the last one of a strong hymn, in unison. The organist is then free to slightly vary the harmony and cadences, and if he has ability in harmonizing melodies this treatment can be made extremely interesting and effective.

Hymn-tune playing demands a decidedly steady tempo and rhythm. Play the tune exactly as you wish it sung and stick to it. If there is a tendency to drag semi-staccato playing will generally overcome it. In hymns of a martial character, like "Onward Christian Soldiers," it is best to play in a semi-staccato manner. Otherwise the playing should be legato. When notes are repeated in the soprano, it is best to play them so; in the other parts they should be tied. As an illustration the tune "Eventide" is given, first, as it appears in the hymnal and then as it should be played. In a general



FIGURE XXXII.





FIGURE XXXIII.

way an attempt should be made to follow the sentiment of the words by means of suitable registration. This is especially desirable in hymns where each stanza expresses a different mood. The principal thing is to discover the climax, and as it is approached to build up a gradual crescendo. If the climax should occur before the end of the hymn, a diminuendo after it might be effective. Where changes in registration are attempted, they should be made between the verses, or at the beginning of a line, unless a special accent is desired on a certain note.

The playing of interludes between the verses is condemned by the best organists as being tedious and unnecessary. A pause of one measure should be made between the verses, while the pedal note is held and released one count before the beginning of the next verse. This release of the pedal serves as a signal

and makes the prompt starting of the verse a certainty. Here is an illustration of this pause between the verses. Fig. 34. Observe that



FIGURE XXXIV.

when a tune begins on the fourth beat the final chord is released at the end of the third beat in order to give a full measure pause before starting again. The Amen is generally played somewhat softer than the ending of the hymn.

CHAPTER III.

USE OF THE PEDALS.



T has been said that a good organist is known by the manner in which he uses the pedals. To many it seems to be the idea that the pedals must be used continually. This is entirely wrong. The pedals add great dignity to the tone of the organ, but, like other good things, have their time and place and are not to be used continually. Very often a silence of several measures will make the entrance of the pedals twice as effective as if no silence were observed. To illustrate this, play the well-known tune "Adeste Fideles," and note the effect produced by a silence of the pedals in the fourth line, followed by their entrance again in the last four measures of the tune. That entrance on the descending scale is irresistible and carries all before it to a splendid climax.

There are many cases, particularly in song accompaniments and anthems, where the pedals can be omitted with excellent effect. A good organist will watch for places where they seem unnecessary. When an accent is desired the pedals can often be used to help obtain this effect. In such a passage as the fol-

lowing: Fig. 35, the pedals should be struck



FIGURE XXXV.

on the first note of each measure; this serves to give the needed accent. A criticism of the organ is often made that it lacks accent. This is partly true, but an accent can be given by means of the above method, or by a sudden closing of the swell-box just as the accented note is struck. The effect of an accent can also be given by imperceptively shortening the note or chord just before an accented note or chord. This instant of silence makes what follows seem to be struck as with an accent.

A faulty habit in hymn and anthem accompaniment is to always play the pedals an octave lower than the printed music. This is often effective in hymns of a strong character, where a large congregation is singing heartily. As a rule, however, it is better to play the notes as written. The pedal stops of sixteen feet

tone will naturally sound an octave lower than the printed notes, but if an octave lower than this is played the tone heard is two octaves lower. If one wishes to play an octave lower than the printed tones, care must be taken to preserve the melodic movement of the bass part as far as possible and avoid awkward skips when the notes run below low C. A bass like Fig. 36 should be played as shown



FIGURE XXXVI.

in Fig. 37, and not like Fig. 38, for in the



FIGURE XXXVII.

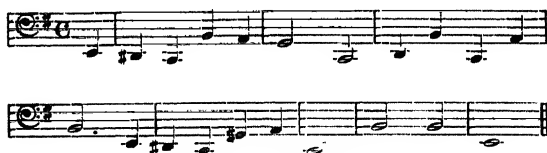


FIGURE XXXVIII.

latter the melodic movement of the part is totally destroyed. As a further illustration

of this, attention is called to the last part of the chorus, "No shadows yonder," Gaul's "Holy City," in which the bass part of the piano accompaniment is written in octaves. In playing it on the organ the upper notes should be used. Pedal stops of sixteen feet coupled to the manuals will produce the octaves the same as they appear in the piano arrangement.

CHAPTER IV.

REGISTRATION.



THE piano accompaniments of oratorios are generally reduced and simplified arrangements of the orchestral scores. It is within the power of organists to restore these accompaniments to a large extent by a little study of the score. In some editions the orchestral instruments are indicated in certain passages. This seems to be a good idea, as it helps an organist very materially to obtain an approximate orchestral effect. When these indications are not given, and it is impossible to secure a complete orchestral score, the organist has to use common sense and try to obtain the best effect possible. This brings us to the subject of registration, which plays such an important part in the effectiveness of an accompaniment.

Individual tastes differ greatly in the matter of registration. On this account, and also because organ stops having the same names are seldom alike in quality or strength, no definite rules can be laid down. On general principles, however, it is better to use the diapason tones more freely than the others; that is, to let this quality predominate most of the time. It is the real organ tone as distinguished from the tones found in the orchestra; it supports and blends admirably with the

voice and does not become tiresome if heard for a length of time. The flutes are valuable also in the same way as the diapasons. Used with the reeds they give body to the tone, and in contrast to the strings are charming. The reeds should be used sparingly, for they soon become tiresome.

For solo effects and obligatos the oboe and clarinet are invaluable. The great and solo reeds are used mostly in trumpet effects or with the full organ.

The string tones, which in the last few years have been brought to a high state of perfection, are among the most valuable assets of the organ. While they become tiresome if used continually, they brighten the tone color and with judicious use are extremely effective, both in combination and in solo.

It is important to notice that in all accompanying the eight feet tone should predominate. Four feet stops may be used to add brilliancy. Sixteen feet stops are not much used, except when great body and fullness is desired, as in accompanying a large chorus.

To a student of orchestration it is comparatively easy to select the right quality of tone for certain passages. To others it is often difficult, because they do not think in tone colors; everything is black and white, as it were, and what registration is attempted is done in an illogical "hit or miss" manner.

It might be said that some passages are

written with a definite tone color or instrument in mind. For instance, in the introduction to Gounod's song, "O Divine Redeemer," it would seem almost certain that the composer had the 'cello in mind. If this passage is played on a flute tone it loses in effectiveness. Here is the passage referred to Fig. 39. No-

Molto moderato.

The musical score is divided into four systems. The first system shows the piano introduction in G major, 3/4 time, marked *Molto moderato*. The right hand has a whole rest, and the left hand plays a descending eighth-note scale starting on G4. The second system continues the piano accompaniment, with the right hand playing a descending eighth-note scale starting on E5. The third system shows the piano accompaniment continuing, with the right hand playing a descending eighth-note scale starting on C5. The fourth system shows the vocal entry, with the right hand playing a descending eighth-note scale starting on G4, and the left hand playing a descending eighth-note scale starting on G3. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Ah!.... turn me not a - way,..... re -".

f Str. tone.

Flute.

p Ped.

Ah!.... turn me not a - way,..... re -



FIGURE XXXIX.

tice the charming effect of the flute tone coming in at the seventh measure and following along in beautiful contrast with the voice. These little touches of color give vitality to an accompaniment, and if properly used are inspiring to a singer.

In playing an orchestral accompaniment on the organ certain effects approximating the orchestral color can be obtained. For instance, the vox celeste, viol de orchestra and gam-bas are used to imitate the strings. The wood-wind tone can be suggested by using the oboe, clarinet and flutes, and occasionally a vox humana is suggestive of this quality. The soft diapasons will call to mind the horns, and for the brass the cornopean and trumpet are effective.

Now, it must be borne in mind that an organ can never sound like an orchestra. No matter how good the imitation of the individual instruments may be, the effect of the whole is totally different. This is partly due to the predominance of organ or diapason tone,

which gives the instrument its dignity, and which is most desirable, particularly for church use. In registrating, an organist should use great care not to make too frequent changes. It is well to bear in mind that when stops are changed there should be some good reason for it. For if such is not the case, it is apt to produce a "freakish" style of playing, which is always disconcerting to singers. For an especial effect a stop may sometimes be drawn just to emphasize a note or word of the text. As an illustration of such a case the well-known anthem, "Rock of Ages," by Dudley Buck, is used. Here we have on page 2 the following phrase, with the words, "Save from wrath," Fig. 40. A stop, such as the

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The top system is for 'Voices' and includes the lyrics 'Save from wrath.....'. The middle system is for 'Organ' and 'Oboe'. The organ part is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 'Ped.' marking under the bass line. The oboe part is written on a single staff with a 'p' marking. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is common time (C). The score shows a phrase of music with a crescendo leading to a final note, where the organ pedal is marked.

FIGURE XL.

oboe, drawn just at the point indicated, will heighten the effect considerably.

From a careful consideration of the preceding pages, it will be noticed that all organ

accompanying needs to be done with care and common sense. The organ is so frequently abused by thoughtless players that it is no wonder this noble instrument has not become more popular. We often hear it made to sound like a bagpipe, or to imitate thunder and other trivial effects. These absurdities should be avoided, and especially should none of this clap-trap be introduced in church accompaniment.

In conclusion, it may be said that, after the fundamental principles of organ accompaniment have been grasped, a little practice and experience will enable one to attain what many organists, simply through careless neglect, fail to accomplish.

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